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## FAIRFAX COUNTY FOOTBALL COACHES ASSOCIATION

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To: Fairfax County Public Schools Administration,

We, the Fairfax County Football Coaches Association (hereinafter, “the Coaches”), write to express our serious concern over the multiple, and highly disturbing media reports and associated rumors suggesting that a member institution may have violated numerous recruiting, residency, and/or eligibility rules.

On June 21, 2024, *The Fairfax Times* reported that there had been “a wave of transfers” into the Hayfield High School football program, and further alleged that several of those transfers “have not followed the residence guidelines for Fairfax County Public Schools or the Virginia High School League.” “High School Recruiting Scandal, Bullying Alleged at Hayfield,” *The Fairfax Times*, June 21, 2024. In a subsequent piece, the *Fairfax Times* further reported on alleged payments to individuals willing to allow their address to be used by students transferring to Hayfield, exploiting the “homeless student status” provision, and that there has been retaliation and online threats made against individuals who voiced concerns about the alleged conduct. “Recruiting Scandal at Hayfield Widens Into Multiple Investigations,” *The Fairfax Times*, June 28, 2024. *The Times* reported that Fairfax County has so far launched no less than three separate investigations into the alleged improprieties.

As noted above, the Coaches view the allegations as significant as they strike at the heart of the age-old maxim for all of us to “play hard, but play fair.” The Coaches acknowledge that transfers are a part of high school sports, and they can happen for a variety of reasons. Students may and sometimes do decide on their own accord to move into a school district because it offers unique opportunities in a variety of activities, or because of the reputation of the program or the coach. Indeed, the new coach at Hayfield has a track record of success at his previous school so some level of transfer is not unexpected.

In this case, however, the sheer volume of reported transfers – 30+ -- raises a red flag. Are players being recruited to attend Hayfield HS? As reported by *the Times*, Billy Haun, the executive director of the VHSL stated that recruiting “is not what high school athletics is about,” and “should not be happening.” Moreover, seeking families to host students, in the form of offering use of addresses, within the Hayfield district raises more red flags. And the fact that it has been alleged that there has been an attempt to silence voices wishing to raise questions about the alleged conduct, create still more red flags. Where there is nothing to hide, administrators at a school should be transparent and open to review.

What is the harm arising from such conduct? Why do we care if there is recruiting and a disregard of residency requirements? First, there is the obvious issue of coaches playing and coaching under a different set of rules. If it is now permissible to recruit students into our district for athletic reasons, as *the Times* suggests may be occurring, it should be permissible for all coaches to do the same. There is also the harm arising from the effect on competitive balance resulting from constructing a team that represents a region rather a school district, particularly when all of your opponents are teams constructed from a single school district. The second *Times* article references “stacking” a team for competitive advantage, and every coach understands what that means and the inequitable environment it creates.



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As coaches, we recognize that whatever we accept we condone. Have students been impermissibly recruited to enroll at Hayfield HS? The Coaches are in no position to say. Indeed, the Coaches express no view as to the accuracy of any of the reports of misconduct. But the Fairfax County School System now faces its own decision about what it will accept and, in this case, condone. As with all things alleged in the press, including the existence of multiple investigations, the Coaches take the reporting with a grain of salt until those charged with administering the league weigh in.

The old axiom that fairness requires a level playing field applies both literally and metaphorically here. What the Coaches respectfully request is that the conduct alleged in the press reports be fully investigated, and that the County communicate to the coaches by July 15, that it is in fact doing so. If after a thorough investigation, all implicated stakeholders are cleared of the allegations of impermissible conduct, the Coaches will welcome such an outcome. But in the absence of some affirmative communication from the County that it is taking the allegations seriously and that it is conducting an investigation, to ensure that all teams are indeed playing on a level playing field, the Coaches intend to explore all available options.

Sincerely,

Fairfax County Football Coaches Association